

Biblical Doctrine of The Rapture of the Church Part 1: What is the Rapture?

The word rapture comes from a latin word, *rapare*, which means “to snatch away,” or “to take out.” As a theological term it refers to the “snatching away” of the church by God at some point near the end of human history. After the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2:1-3:22, John is “raptured” away into heaven, Rev 4:1ff. The church is never mentioned again until the inauguration of the millennium. This indicates that the church, like John, will be removed from earth during the events of the tribulation. Note these three things: (1) The rapture is the first event in the beginning of the end of human history, see 1 Thess 4:13-5:11; (2) The bodies of those believers who are dead in Christ will be resurrected and caught up to meet Jesus, 1 Thess 4:13-16; (3) Living believers will also be changed and caught up to be with Jesus and the resurrected, see 1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Thess 4:17-18. At this point all believers will be removed from the earth until the time of the millennium, 1 Thess 1:9-10; 5:9-11.

What purpose would such an event as the rapture serve? The Bible suggests at least four reasons for the rapture:

1. **Deliverance** – believers are delivered from the wrath of God that will be poured out on the earth during the tribulation which will last for seven years. The tribulation will also prepare Israel to receive Christ and prepare them for the restoration, Dt 4:29-31; Jer 30:4-11; 1 Thess 1:9-10, and for their role as God’s evangelists after the church is taken away, Rev 7:1-8.
2. **Accountability** – believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, called the *bema* to give account of the stewardship of life and to receive rewards where rewards are due, Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Cor 3:111-17.
3. **Cancellation** – God will withdraw the restraining power of the Holy Spirit and allow evil to run its final course in human history before the final sentence of Satan, his angels and all the unbelieving into eternal punishment, 2 Thess 2:6-12; Rev 20:11-15. All divine restraints that now protect mankind will be removed.
4. **Consumation** –At the end of the tribulation believers will join with Christ in the Marriage supper of the Lamb, Rev 19:1-10. This is the formal presentation of the bride of Christ, the church, to Christ, the bridegroom.

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